

When I was about to leave Tientsin for Shanghai I thought it desirable, in view of the former Emperor's long association with British friends, to make him acquainted with two of my nationals on whose disinterested advice he could rely in case of any difficulty. I accepted an invitation to a lunch, at which the introductions were effected, and as I said what I thought was my final good-bye to him, I remarked, little thinking that any significance would attach to my words, that I hoped that next time I met him there would be no more formalities to be observed before I could see him, and that I might even have to invoke the assistance of a Foreign Office official. His reply was that he would always be accessible to me, and a few hours later he sent a messenger to ask me to tea on my last day in Tientsin. It was really a very touching interview, as he seemed so very reluctant to let me go, telling me again and again how much he would miss me.

In September 1932 I went up to Manchuria to study the situation on the spot. After brief visits to Dairen and Mukden I proceeded to Changchun, the new capital. I had hardly reached the hotel there when a young Chinese Foreign Office official called to say that the Chief Executive, Mr. Pu Yi, had heard of my coming, and would be pleased to receive me at 10:30 next morning. This young man, Mr. Yu, who can converse equally readily in Chinese, English, Japanese and Russian, called for me in good time and escorted me to the former Emperor's residence. After a wait of a few minutes in the official reception-room, a message was received that the Chief Executive could see me in his private apartments, to which I was immediately conducted.

Mr. Pu Yi greeted me with obvious pleasure, taking both my hands and leading me over to a sofa where he invited me to sit beside him. As I remember, he asked, what I had said when taking leave of him at the Tientsin lunch party? Well, my prophecy had come true.

He was suffering from some affection of his feet, and explained that he was on a special diet, but that he hoped that I would remain for lunch, to which one of his younger brothers would accompany me, and we could talk undisturbed until lunch-time.

I told Mr. Pu Yi the object of my visit to Manchoukuo, and said that later I should like to put some formal questions to him for my newspaper articles. First, however, might I ask him a few personal questions as a friend? He replied that I could ask him any question I wished.

I then said that it would interest his foreign and Chinese friends to know whether he was really happy in his present position. He replied emphatically that he was. He went on to say that he was not busy, but not so busy as he had been when he first came to Changchun, as the administrative machinery was now better organized.

Next I informed him that the general belief in China was that he had been coerced into his present position, and was not a free agent in any respect. He not only strongly denied this, but added that he would like to tell me why he had assumed his new office. He had been actuated by two motives--political and personal. First, as to the political. When the Manchu Dynasty abdicated it had been with the avowed intention of restoring the sovereignty to the people. But in the twenty years that had elapsed, what had happened? Political power had passed into the hands, not of the people, but of

ambitious and grasping militarists. The welfare of the population had been entirely disregarded; they had been tyrannized over and oppressed. China's relations with the foreign powers had grown steadily worse. And the pledge that absolute equality would be maintained between China's five races had been flagrantly violated.

Secondly, he was prompted by personal motives. Manchuria was his ancestral home, and it was only natural that he should be specially interested in what was happening in this region. Moreover, every undertaking given to the Manchu Imperial Family in the Abdication Agreement had been wantonly violated. The pension to be paid to him by the Republic had been cancelled. His private property had been confiscated. He had been treated with studied insolence by the Kuomintang. And the ancestral tombs had been violated and rifled, without any attempt to bring the perpetrators to book or to secure the recovery of the stolen treasures.

It was only natural, then, that when trouble occurred in Manchuria he should follow developments with great attention, and wonder whether he was not destined to play some part in an attempt to improve the condition of his ancestral Provinces. Emissaries of the Separatist movement called upon him at Tientsin and urged him to proceed to Manchuria. And at last he felt that if he was ever to go, he must do so forthwith, or he might find it impossible to leave.

The possibility of a restoration movement was obviously known to and apprehended by the Nanking Government, for an agent of General Chiang Kai-shek offered temporarily to restore the conditions of favourable treatment if he (the ex-Emperor) would repudiate it. His reply was that the Republican Government could best fulfil its responsibilities by concerning itself with the welfare of the people, by giving them good government, and by restoring internal peace. If it had four million taels annually to spare (the amount of the Imperial pension) let it expend the money on relieving the existing poverty in China, for which it was mainly responsible.

"Then the current report that you were kidnapped and sent to Port Arthur under Japanese escort in a destroyer is not true?" I asked.

Mr. Pu Yi threw back his head and roared with laughter, repeating in English: "Kidnapped! Kidnapped! No! No!"

I then remarked that what he had told me up till then was confidential, but that as a matter of historical interest I should like to know exactly what happened when he left Tientsin.

Mr. Pu Yi replied that nothing he had told me need be considered confidential. He had no secrets to hide, and he would gladly detail his movements previous to coming to Changchun. They had had to be kept secret at the time for two reasons: first, because his departure from Tientsin might have been frustrated; secondly, because he would have been in considerable danger of assassination had his whereabouts been generally known.

He left Tientsin just as the trouble between the Japanese and Chinese in that city broke out, and traveled to Yinkow (Newchwang) direct by the steamer Awachi Maru, leaving a letter behind to the Japanese Consul-General asking him to afford adequate protection to the Empress after his departure. From Newchwang he proceeded by rail to Tang Kung Tzu (the hot springs between Liaoyang and Tashihchao), whence he returned to Port Arthur to meet his wife a few days later. She also traveled on an ordinary steamer. The next few weeks he spent quietly in Port Arthur, studying the siege operations of the Russo-Japanese War, and visiting the ruins of the former Russian fortifications. He and the Empress then preceded once more to Tang Kung Tzu, where they lived until he agreed to go

to Changchun. When he was convinced that it was his duty to go north and assume the office of Chief Executive he went right through to Changchun by train. At no time in Tientsin, in the Japanese leased territory, or in Manchuria, had he been under any restraint, nor had any coercion been applied to him.

(I may say here that later the same day the Prime Minister of Manchoukuo, former tutor of the Emperor, gave me a more detailed account of Mr. Pu Yi's flight from Tientsin. It was decided upon at a few hours' notice. He was instructed to meet the ex-Emperor, attired in foreign clothes--which he had never previously worn--at a pre-arranged rendezvous. The party went down-river in a fast motor-boat and boarded the AWACHI MARU in the roadstead, the weather being so rough that the ex-Emperor was almost in a state of collapse when they reached the vessel. There was considerable danger, as heavy firing was in progress when they left the Japanese Concession, and Mr. Pu Yi would probably have been shot if he had been caught and identified by Chinese troops.)

I remained to lunch at Mr. Pu Yi's residence, in company with Prince Pu Chia, a younger brother, and towards the end of the meal the ex-Emperor limped downstairs and into the room to reintroduce me to my old friend, "Mr. Ponto", his thoroughbred mastiff. Afterwards I was again invited into his sitting-room, where he presented me with a signed photograph, and various souvenirs (a medal, cuff-links, etc.) of cloisonne-work, embodying the flag of the new State.

About seventeen months later I again paid a brief visit to Hsinking (Changchun) to be present at the enthronement of Mr. Pu Yi as Emperor of Manchoukuo. The actual ceremony by which he was installed upon the Throne of the earlier members of his Dynasty, took place during the morning of March 1, 1934. The Emperor accorded me a private interview on February 28. I found him looking well and obviously pleased at the turn of events. He conversed with me freely for a quarter of an hour, allowed me to take several snapshots of him, and, in the belief that I should broadcast a description of the ceremony to Great Britain, gave me a message to the British nation. (The arrangements for this broadcast were cancelled.

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I had several interviews with my old friend Mr. Cheng Hsiachsu, the Prime Minister of Manchoukuo, during my brief visit on this occasion. He was obviously delighted to witness the consummation of his loyal service to his young Master, though he had aged considerably, owing, presumably, to the cares of office, and the sorrow caused by the death of his elder son.



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